



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY HODEL ACCEPTS DU PONT GRANT FOR BALD EAGLE RECOVERY PROGRAM

The return of the nation's symbol -- the bald eagle -- is getting an assist these days from the Du Pont Company and some rather unlikely feathered friends.

Interior Secretary Don Hodel today accepted, from Du Pont Executive Vice President Dr. Robert C. Forney, a \$50,000 check for the support of a captive breeding program for bald eagles at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Maryland.

The funds, the third annual grant from the company, are used to increase the number of eaglets produced at the research center, an effort which includes the hiring of some unusual, feathered, prenatal baby sitters.

Patuxent scientists have discovered they can produce more eaglets by using good old fashioned chickens instead of artificial incubators to incubate the precious eagle eggs. It's a clear case of Mother Nature beating out modern technology.

Secretary Hodel cited the advances made at Patuxent, with Du Pont's aid, during the April 16 ceremony.

"The funds contributed by Du Pont have enabled the Patuxent bald eagle breeding program to increase from eight eagle pairs in 1982 to 14 pairs today," Secretary Hodel said. "Last year alone, 18 eaglets were produced here, more than in any previous year. And the benefits of this grant will continue to be felt for many years to come, because we expect the eagles now breeding here to continue to be productive in the future.

"The Du Pont Company's support of this program stands as a model of corporate participation in wildlife conservation," Secretary Hodel concluded.

"We at Du Pont continue to be impressed with the scope, innovation, and sophistication of this unique cooperative effort between the private and public sectors to conserve an endangered species -- our national symbol," Dr. Forney said. "Our support of the American bald eagle is really an extension of a broad corporate commitment at Du Pont. We have always believed we have a responsibility not only to protect but also to enhance the environment."

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Including this year's grant, the Du Pont Company has now contributed a total of \$150,000 directly to the eagle breeding program. The funds have been used to renovate cages so that more eagle pairs can be maintained, fund annual preventive and corrective maintenance of the eagle facilities, acquire better birds to replace those that produced poorly, and appoint a bald eagle coordinator to handle eagle management and care. In addition to direct support for the breeding program, Du Pont has carried out a variety of educational efforts on behalf of the bald eagle, including printing 150,000 copies of an eagle booklet for distribution by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at national wildlife refuges and other locations.

Last year, Patuxent eaglets were released in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Tennessee, Georgia, and -- for the first time -- North Carolina. In previous years, eaglets have also been released in New York, Maine, Delaware, and Virginia. A total of 71 Patuxent eaglets have been released to the wild since 1976.

In spite of a steady increase in eaglet production, however, Patuxent still cannot provide enough eaglets to satisfy all the requests from States. Seeking to increase production, the researchers recently decided to use chickens to incubate the eagle eggs. They were dissatisfied with artificial incubators because only about half of the fertile eggs incubated artificially were hatching. In November 1983, based on research done with peregrine falcons and other species, Patuxent acquired a flock of cochin bantam chickens, bred specifically for their incubating abilities. Although eagle eggs are much larger than chicken eggs, each chicken is capable of incubating five eagle eggs at once!

In the spring of 1984, 15 eggs that formerly would have been placed in an artificial incubator were placed under the chickens. Fourteen eggs hatched. The researchers credit the chickens with at least part of the responsibility for the record production of 18 healthy eaglets last year.

This year, if all goes well, Patuxent's eagles -- with some help from the chickens -- could produce as many as 19 eaglets. They will probably be released in the States of New Jersey, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Ohio.

The eaglets are returned to the wild by two methods. In "fostering," 2-1/2-week-old eaglets are placed in the nests of eagle pairs that either produce infertile eggs or lay no eggs at all. The eaglets are readily adopted by their unsuspecting foster parents. The second method, "hacking," involves placing 8-week-old eaglets in lofty "hacking towers." They are fed by handlers, who remain out of sight. Gradually, as the eaglets become able to fly, less food is supplied and they learn to hunt for themselves, just as if they had been raised by bald eagle parents.

The bald eagle is listed as an endangered or threatened species throughout the Lower 48 States. About 5,000 to 6,000 bald eagles, including about 1,500 breeding pairs, reside in the Lower 48 States year-round.



For the third consecutive year, the Du Pont Company has contributed \$50,000 to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help produce more little bald eagles like this 2-week-old youngster hatched at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Md. Last year 18 eaglets born at Patuxent were returned to the wild in eastern States.



Scientists at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center have discovered that bald eagle eggs are more likely to hatch when incubated by bantam chickens than when placed in artificial incubators. Although eagle eggs are much larger than chicken eggs, each chicken is capable of incubating as many as five eagle eggs!

photos courtesy of the Du Pont Company.

EDITORS: A limited number of these black and white photos and videotape of wild bald eagles are available on a loan basis from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Audio-Visual Office, (202) 343-8770.